

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 000795

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/12/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: ECUADOR: DIALOGUE OVER; TIME TO STRIKE

REF: QUITO 781

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney. Reason 1.4 (b&d).

1. (C) Summary: Congress tried but failed to pass legislation to resolve the Supreme Court issue on April 12. Quito opposition leaders will therefore try to close down the capital in protest, starting early on April 13. How long the "general strike" will last is not clear. The private sector in the capital is divided, some favoring an indefinite strike, others fretting over costs. With Guayaquil deferring its own protests until later this month, the Quito strike no longer has any pretensions of national scope. Most here believe the government can weather the protests, and thus far the government has not over-reacted. We will monitor and report strike developments closely. End Summary.

Dialogue Broken Off

2. (C) After Minister of Government Oscar Ayerve had raised hopes that the government and opposition were nearing agreement on a formula to resolve the festering controversy over the current Supreme Court, the opposition abruptly broke off dialogue during the evening of April 11. Congressmen Andres Paez (ID) and Luis Fernando Torres (PSC) blamed Ayerve for the rupture, citing the government's resistance to the opposition's proposed formula for a selection committee to select new Supreme Court justices. Government and opposition had agreed to vacate the current Supreme Court immediately, and hold a referendum to ratify the formula to select new judges. On the selection committee issue, however, they differed. President Gutierrez issued a national call on Congress to act on April 12 to terminate the Supreme Court. Opposition members blamed the government in advance for the failure of Congress to act.

Congress: No Action

3. (C) On April 12, Congress went into session to debate competing proposals over how to terminate the current Supreme Court. The session concluded inconclusively however, after the opposition proposal supported by the PSC, ID, Socialists, DP and Pachakutik fell one vote short of success. Independent deputies introduced a new bill on the court issue, with government approval, which would require new debate, called for April 13. Torres told us he felt tricked by the government's "triple-discourse," and accused the government of using bribes to defeat the opposition proposal. He speculated that the government's maneuvers in Congress could turn even the reluctant Guayaquil-based opposition into the streets.

Strike to Start April 13

4. (U) Assembly of Quito and Pichincha province leaders announced on April 12 that a long-threatened indefinite strike would shut down the capital and surrounding province, as well as Azuay, Chimborazo and Imbabura provinces, from midnight April 12. Indigenous groups have announced "parallel" anti-government protests. Strike organizers said they would close access roads into the capital, demonstrate at nine "strategic locations," and likely will convoke a protest march during the day. Military authorities assured the Ambassador on April 11 that the Quito international airport would remain open. A mayor from the Amazon region threatened to turn off the capital's water supply as a form of protest against the strike and in support of the government. The Education Ministry declared all schools closed for April 13. President of Congress Omar Quintana told the press that counter-marches would be organized in support of the government.

Guayaquil Hedges

5. (U) Guayaquil Mayor Jaime Nebot convoked an ad-hoc Assembly of Guayaquil meeting on April 11 where he announced that Guayaquil will coordinate with other coastal municipalities to organize a protest march in favor of local autonomy concerns. He did not set a date for the protest, saying only that it should be "sooner rather than later" and sometime during April. Guayaquil-based business groups had strongly objected to any protest intended to stop work,

causing Nebot to choose a march over a strike.

Presidential Advisor Pessimistic

16. (C) Presidential Secretary Carlos Polit told the Ambassador early on April 12 that a strike was inevitable. Polit blamed the failure of dialogue squarely on Ayerve, "the wrong man for the job." He described a call he had received from ID congressman Andres Paez complaining about being photographed with Ayerve, a man with "heavy political baggage." Ayerve's bad political judgment included his support for ex-president Bucaram's offer to turn his supporters into the streets in support of the government simultaneously with anti-government protests in Guayaquil. This was a recipe for violence, he said, which could in a worst-case scenario galvanize further anti-government protests. Polit said he planned to recommend that President Gutierrez deflate the protests by announcing a Cabinet shake-up, including replacing Government Minister Ayerve with Labor Minister Izurieta.

Comment

17. (C) The conditions for real dialogue dissipated with the approach of the opposition's threatened strike action, and eventually talks reached an impasse. Congressional non-action reflected worse on the government, since it blocked the opposition's attempt to pass legislation to resolve the issue. Some in the opposition were clearly wedded to more confrontational tactics, especially the more radical members of the Assembly of Quito.

18. (C) Squabbles for power and justice here are prone to brinkmanship, but generally remain non-violent. General strikes are particularly high-risk, given recent history here. Two presidents have been deposed in the past eight years after general strikes or mobilizations brought opponents into the streets. But this strike, at least initially, is not national in scope. In addition, no destabilization attempt has succeeded in recent times without indigenous mobilization and military support. By most accounts Gutierrez retains firm control of the military, and has effectively neutralized the indigenous. Until these conditions change, street protests are not likely to shake this government.
KENNEY